



Nerve Center: Inside the White House Situation Room

Michael K. Bohn

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The White House Situation Room is arguably the most important facility in the most important building in the world. As the president's intelligence and alert center, it provides vital communication and crisis management capabilities to the chief executive and his advisers. It can also be "an island of calm," as a top adviser for Vice President Al Gore once described it. So little is known about the Situation Room that, until the publication of *Nerve Center*, the American public's knowledge of it is almost entirely based on its portrayal by the entertainment industry. Yet, as Michael K. Bohn points out, Hollywood has failed to capture the real drama of the Situation Room. Numerous crises come alive in *Nerve Center*, from the Vietnam War (when President Johnson made late night visits to the Situation Room wearing his pajamas and went so often that he moved his Oval Office chair there), to the attempted assassination of President Ronald Reagan, to today's high-tech war on terrorism. Created in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs fiasco by advisers to President John Kennedy, presidents, cabinet members, and National Security Council staff members have all come to depend on the Situation Room. "I knew that I could always rely on the Situation Room," President Jimmy Carter recalled, "and it never let me down." Bohn, who served as director of the Situation Room for the first President George Bush, has recruited numerous officials, including former and current staff, to tell the colorful forty-year history of the Situation Room. In a final chapter, Bohn uses a fictional crisis to describe how the Situation Room will evolve to help the president meet the challenges of an increasingly dangerous future.

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